

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson****The Future of FEMA's Grant Programs Directorate**

June 29, 2010 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Emergency Communication, Preparedness, and Response Subcommittee hearing entitled “The Future of FEMA's Grant Programs Directorate”:

“With State and local budgets shrinking across the country, our State and local partners will continue to rely heavily on federal preparedness grant programs to keep our citizens safe. That is why this Committee has taken steps this Congress to improve FEMA's stewardship of homeland security grants.

Just last week, for example, the Committee approved legislation sponsored by Chairwoman Richardson that would give grantees more flexibility to use their grant awards to meet their most-urgent homeland security needs.

Last fall, the Committee forced FEMA to back-down on its grant maintenance policy after we marked-up legislation overturning it. We are here this morning to follow-up on those efforts and identify new opportunities to improve grant programs and FEMA's management of them. As the Chairwoman indicated, FEMA's grant office is at a crossroads.

The talk of regional empowerment sounded promising at first, but as more time has passed, we have learned less about the initiative, instead of more. Consequently, it is raising larger questions about how DHS intends to oversee national grant programs.

At this point, I would much rather see FEMA focus on strengthening its central grant office than splintering its mission across 10 regions. Because, as Ms. Harman has found out, GPD has its fair share of challenges.

One of the issues I am most concerned about is the 50 vacancies at the directorate, which is more than 25 percent of GPD's total workforce. FEMA cannot be good stewards of taxpayer dollars without adequate staff.

I am also concerned by the office's over-reliance on contractors. This subcommittee held a hearing last fall on one contractor-driven grants management tool that simply failed to deliver after costing taxpayers more than \$5 million. FEMA must do more to end its reliance on contractors or else we'll have more failed projects like the Cost-2-Capability initiative.

Finally, I would like to see FEMA continue to focus on improving its customer service. FEMA has an obligation to help cities and rural communities alike know about and apply for federal grants. Guidance must be easy to understand and more consistent, so that all of our first responders—paid and volunteer—receive the tools and resources they need.

I look forward to hearing from the panel about their ideas for improving FEMA's relationship with its state and local partners.”

#

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Please contact Dena Graziano or Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978

